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ABSTRACT

Kindergarten-aged children's use of parallel constructions in their peer storytelling, while not common, reflect children's interest in the organizational principle of theme and variation. Semantic and syntactic parallelism represent two of many ways in which some youngsters employ theme and variation in their storytelling. The constructions give a sense of cohesiveness to narrative efforts and provide a mechanism for organizing descriptions of the fictive world. Semantic parallelism, the more common form, emphasizes cataloging skills. In these constructions the children hold constant the stated and then implied syntactic frame as well as the central idea of the meaning set, and variation develops as they consider the range of phenomena that can be appropriately described within that central idea. This cataloging gives narrators a resource for fleshing out their stories, augmenting the storyteller role. Audience members can capitalize on the central idea of a meaning set in attempting to co-narrate and to comment. In responding to audience contributions, narrators deal with the issues of speaking rights and the boundaries of the narrative itself. (Author/MSE)

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SEMANTIC AND SYNTACTIC PARALLELISM IN CHILDREN'S STORYTELLING

by

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SEMANTIC AND SYNTACTIC PARALLELISM IN CHILDREN'S STORYTELLING

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To date, most studies of parallelism have focused on highly marked systems of oral poetry. The emphasis has been on oral epic and ritual speech and on their use by accomplished speakers within given communities (for ethnographic examples: Sherzer and Sherzer 1972; Bricker 1974; Fox 1974). Little attention, however, has been paid to parallelism in more informal genres or in conversation-like exchange. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to children's management of parallelistic constructions.[1] In the following pages, I focus on semantic and syntactic parallelism in the storytelling of kindergarten-age children. As I explain, these children employed parallelism in their narration as well as in their conarration and metanarration. Drawing on comparative data, I place the kindergarteners' efforts within the context of both younger and older children's use of parallelism. In doing so, I suggest that the use of parallelism reflects children's interest in the principle of theme and variation (Sutton-Smith 1981), and that the kindergarteners are at a transition stage in the application of this principle.

The general data base, described in detail elsewhere (Roemer 1980), was obtained through seven months of the school year 1974-75. The informants were approximately fifty white, middle class, five- through nine-year-olds who attended two after-school day-care centers in Austin, Texas.[2] Except during bad weather, the collecting sessions were held outdoors, in the playground area. The sessions lasted from fifteen minutes to an hour each. Usually two to eight youngsters were present. They were free to watch, join in or leave the sessions as suited them.

In introducing myself at the beginning of the fieldwork period, I explained that I was interested in the sorts of things--like stories, songs, riddles, etc.--that the youngsters told one another when adults weren't around. Thereafter, I tried to remain silent during our sessions, encouraging the youngsters to organize their exchanges themselves. Because the tape recorder ran continuously during each session, I was able to record not only the children's performances per se but also their interactions as they responded to the material.

For the purposes of the present report, I have selected material from this larger corpus. From the eight kindergarteners in the larger population, I focus on data obtained from three girls and one boy (ages 5-6 years). These children were friends and oftentimes participated in the same collecting sessions. Their interactions resembled those of the other kindergarteners in all but one respect. Unlike the narratives told by the other kindergarteners, the stories treated here illustrate semantic and, at times, syntactic parallelism. The parallelism is used to develop descriptive passages within the stories. Generally speaking, these passages catalog the personnel and phenomena of the fictive world.

Parallelism in Narration

Victoria Bricker's (1974) work with parallelistic constructions suggests a perspective that can be applied to the children's efforts. Among other organizational possibilities, Bricker explains, a speaker can begin a construction with a syntactic frame, for example, "thou art my _____." The speaker then repeats this frame through the rest of the construction:

thou art my father
Thou art my mother.

The fact of this repetition constitutes syntactic parallelism. As to semantic parallelism, the frame contains one or more slots which the speaker fills with variable elements. These elements form what Bricker terms a "meaning set." They share at least one meaning component that defines the set. Though antonyms, the terms "father" and "mother" above share the

meaning component "parent" (1974:370-372).

The Austin stories make varied use of this arrangement. As the first example, we can consider the excerpt below. The passage is from a story about Saint Nicholas' visit ~~on~~ Christmas Eve.[3] For emphasis, I have indented some of the entries in the construction's second meaning set, presenting these elements in a list. The construction as a whole spans lines 3-16:

(1) 1 [the children] couldn't stay up, and so all their stockings hangin'
2 up on the fire-, down down goes the chimney Saint Nicholas and all.
3 He filled up the stockings with horns,
4 balls,
5 toys, all, all,
6 dolls for children,
7 dolls for girls,
8 horns for boys,
9 (?) for boys and everything all.
10 He filled the stockings with nuts.
11 He filled the stockings with balloons.
12 He filled it with everywhere and <u>everything</u>.
13 He filled up the stockings with everything.
14 He filled 'em.
15 He filled 'em.
16 He filled 'em with toys.
17 Then with a wink, his nose bright as a cherry, and his face like
18 an apple, up the chimney he rose with his nose to his [pause] his
19 nose to his [continues the narration]

More so than the other excerpts I will treat, this passage follows the organizational scheme summarized above. The narrator, five-year-old Lydia, establishes and repeats the syntactic frame "He filled _____ with _____." The initial slot is occupied by complementary terms ("the stockings," "it," "'em") that refer to the container in which Saint

Nicholas places the gifts. The second slot considers the kinds of gifts Saint Nicholas bestows: "horns," "balls," "toys," etc. On the other hand, there is a significant difference between Lydia's efforts and the scheme given above. Lydia is not consistent in stating the syntactic frame. To be sure, she establishes the frame at the beginning of the construction and repeats it, with occasional abbreviation, in lines 10-16. With lines 4-9, though, the relevance of the frame is merely suggested. As a result, lines 4-9 stress semantic rather than syntactic and semantic parallelism.[4]

Other excerpts carry this modification a step further. Whereas Lydia above states the frame, omits it, and then returns to it, in the passages below the narrators give the syntactic frame only once, usually at the beginning of the construction. Elsewhere in the passage, the relevance of the frame is implied. Excerpt (2), also given by Lydia, provides an example. The syntactic frame is "there was a _____." The frame is stated in line 2. The meaning set details the members of a family:

(2) 1 Once upon a time there lived a family,
2 and there was a mother,
3 father,
4 a little girl,
5 and a little boy,
6 and a baby girl,
7 and a baby boy,
8 and they lived in a home on Christmas Eve, and not even a sound
9 [continues the narration]

From my own point of view, Lydia's deletion of the frame in lines 3-7 does not interfere with the passage's intelligibility. This clarity can be ascribed to several factors. Each of entries 3-7 is (or contains) a noun phrase that can be applied successfully within the frame "there was a _____." In addition, each of the entries mentions a member of the "family" referenced in line 1. Like the initial term "mother," which is directly modified by the frame, the terms "father," "a little

girl," "a little boy," "a baby girl," and "a baby boy" can be understood as appropriate to the category "members of a family."

Excerpt (3) illustrates an alternate way in which the basic scheme is developed. Here, the syntactic frame follows rather than precedes the elements of the meaning set. That set deals with animals who serve as rescuers:

(3) so [the fishies from the ocean] didn't die, and so they looked around in the forest until all those reindeers,
and peacocks,
and bunny rabbits had to save 'em from all the other mean animals because they were the strongest ones they can only find 'cause they're eating [continues the narration]

Excerpts (1) through (3) illustrate parallelism in single speaker stories told by girls. My choice of these examples has been by necessity. In the Austin data, such constructions were initiated only by the girls. However, there is evidence that kindergarten boys use similar constructions. In The Folkstories of Children (1981), Brian Sutton-Smith gives over 500 made-up stories collected from two- through ten-year-old Philadelphia children. Among them is the following narrative, offered by a five-year-old boy. As with Lydia's and Merrie's stories, the boy interrupts the syntagmatic development of his story to develop a meaning set. Specifically, he establishes the syntactic frame "There was a _____" (line 3), which he states only once. In giving the full narrative below, I have indented the terms of the meaning set (lines 3-8). The punctuation and capitalization are Sutton-Smith's:[5]

(4) 1 Once upon a time there was a millionaire that liked to be fancy.
2 It was a very fine night with a full moon. There was a big puff
3 of smoke. There was a vampire,
4 an evil magician,
5 Dr. Frankenstein making the Frankenstein monster,
6 Count Vampire,

7 a devil,
8 and a witch on a broomstick flew by the moon.
9 He didn't know what was happening. And then the vampire struck!
10 And then the witch came down and cast an evil spell on the fancy
11 man, who was rich, and that spell was to turn him into a frog.
12 And the creeps lived happily ever after and the fancy man was a
13 creep, too (1981:137)

In single speaker narration such as this, the narrator assumes responsibility for whatever meaning sets are pursued. The constructions to which I turn next also allow children practice with cataloging skills. In these cases, though, the audience attempts an active role in the interaction. As a result, meaning sets are explored jointly by the narrator and the audience in "interjected routines." Like other communicative routines discussed in the literature (e.g., Boggs and Watson-Gegeo 1978), an interjected routine is an intersentential construction. It is composed of utterances that are linked in certain sequences to accomplish particular functions (Roemer 1980).

Parallelism in Metanarration and Conarration

Of the twenty-three stories offered by the four kindergarteners, seven (approximately 30%) contain some sort of parallelistic construction. Given the narrators' tendency to develop these constructions, it is not surprising that their audiences tried occasionally to contribute to them. After all, the very fact of a recognizable pattern invites involvement (Burke 1957; Abrahams 1968). However, just as the audience might have situation specific reasons for contributing to a meaning set, narrators could react to these contributions in various ways.

I begin with an interjected routine which, in its basic form, resembles the constructions typically found in single speaker narration. Like those constructions, this exchange stresses semantic parallelism. The syntactic frame is stated once, at the beginning of the routine, and thereafter is implied. The excerpt also demonstrates a common reaction to audience commentary. The narrator, Merrie, engineers an effective, though rather mild, defense of her position as the storyteller:

(5)
1 Merrie: and the giant octopus was very mean so all the fishies had
2 to get him, and when, and and when it was nighttime and
3 the fish were all asleep, he he got away, and then they
4 looked for him all again, and it was hard! And then they
5 went out of the water, and they still didn't die.
6 because it was sunny,
7 rainy,
8 windy,
9 and all those kinds of things, and
10 Silva: snowy?
11 Merrie: Yeah, and snowy
12 and so they didn't die, and so they looked around in the
13 forest until all these reindeers [continues the narration
14 with excerpt no. 3 above]

At line 6, Merrie establishes the syntactic frame "because it was _____," referring to environmental conditions in the fictive world. She also provides four entries in the meaning set (lines 6-9). An audience member, Silva, suggests a fifth (line 10: "snowy?"), tactfully couching her proposal as an interrogative. Merrie then responds to Silva's suggestion. Among the Austin children (Roemer 1980), it was the narrator's choice whether audience commentary would enjoy conarrational status or be relegated to the domain of backgrounded material. Although the kindergarteners tended to be more accepting of audience commentary than the older children, kindergarten narrators were capable of protecting

their right to the floor. In the excerpt above, Merrie accepts Silva's terms "snowy," thereby allowing Silva to influence the narration. However, by restating that term herself (line 11: "Yeah, and snowy"), Merrie insures that the utterances comprising this part of the story are only the ones she herself produces. Thus, as a result of Merrie's restatement, Silva's comment is identified as relevant metanarration but nonetheless as metanarration.

An attempted contribution to the storytelling, therefore, brought into question the narrator's role as the sole storyteller. By group consensus, a child had been accorded the right to tell his or her story. To what extent, then, should that child share the stage with vocal audience members? In addition, contributions made problematic the boundaries of the narrative itself. Which utterances should be considered part of the story and which should not? The kindergarteners, of course, were probably not self-consciously aware of these issues per se. Nevertheless, we can note that, at least on some occasions, the kindergarteners were capable of effective solutions. Merrie above demonstrates one reaction to these problems. In serving as a narrator in her own right below, Silva demonstrates another. Here, Silva permits audience commentary to stand as part of the storytelling proper:

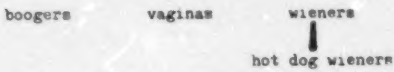
(6) 1 Silva: Ok, and now the witch went upstairs and went to the toilet.
2 She pulled down her underwear, and all the poop came out.
3 and it fell in the dungeon
4 Troy: Oooh, yeah, the dungeon was her toilet
5 Silva: Ok, and then she went to sleep, and the wickedest thing
6 happened. Her cat came back with a piece of poop on it.
7 The dungeon was filled with all the stuff she went potty in,
8 and it has the bad stuff like boogers,

9		and vaginas,
10		wieners,
11	Troy:	Yeah, hot dog wieners
12	Silva:	and pisses
13	Troy:	pisses?
14	Silva:	and pisses
15	Troy:	Yeah, and pisses on the wienies
16	Silva:	and um she had one little cat, and it was smaller than any
17		other cat, and she said, "Go away and find my black hat!"
18		[continues the narration]

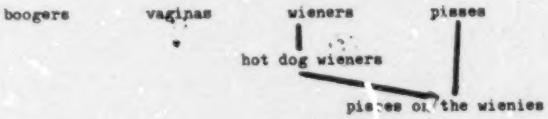
Silva establishes the syntactic frame "it has the bad stuff like _____" (line 8). She then names three things that belong to the class of "bad stuff": "boogers, and vaginas, wieners" (lines 8-10). At line 11, Troy begins his own contributions. By offering these, Troy suggests his understanding of the set's central idea and his interest in extending this line of thought. As was Silva's apparent intent when she tried to contribute to Merrie's story (excerpt no. 5), Troy's comments indicate his involvement in the storytelling. Unlike Merrie, Silva in this case at least is willing to regard audience commentary as supportive rather than as disruptive. By not explicitly rejecting Troy's suggestions, Silva tacitly allows them the status of conarration.

In addition to illustrating the amicable development of a meaning set, this exchange is interesting for another reason. The parallelism complicates the pattern I've discussed previously. Troy's contributions do not merely extend Silva's semantic field. They deepen it. In effect, Troy's entries propose sub-paradigms within the larger paradigm of the meaning set. One of these elaborations is accomplished by Troy's initial entry. This treats Silva's preceding contribution "wieners" (line 10) as containing the syntactic frame " _____ wieners." Troy can then be understood as applying this frame with his own comment "hot dog wieners" (line 11). The

relationship of Troy's entries to the preceding terms is indicated below:



Another case of embedding occurs toward the end of the routine. At line 14, Silva repeats one of her entries: "and pisses." Troy's contribution at line 15 relates back to and links this and other of the preceding terms. Their interrelationships are sketched below:



As a result of this final contribution, the elements of the meaning set are tied even more closely together.

In the preceding examples, audience commentary is prompted by the audience's supportive interest in the storytelling. This is not the case in the interaction below. Here, the audience is antagonistic. One of their concerns is narrator-audience role relationships:

(7) 1 Merrie: Little Red Riding Hood (was going?) to her grandmother
2 because her grandmother was very poor and sick in bed, so
3 she gave her doughnuts and, ugh! be quiet [the audience
4 members are talking softly among themselves, paying little
5 attention to Merrie] and then she gave it to, UGH! um um
6 [pause] then, ugh! be quiet! then [pause] then they they
7 they got doughnuts and um and um and BE QUIET! [pause] quiet
8 Silva: [mimics Merrie's tone:] Quiet [giggles]
9 Merrie: [to DR:] They won't be quiet. They won't be quiet. [pause]
10 [to audience:] Oh, be quiet!
11 and they had doughnuts,

12 and butter
13 Silva: Butter? Yuk!
14 Merrie: Ugh! I mean doughnuts and
15 Silva: (?)
16 Merrie: No, dough-
17 Sharon: doughnuts,
18 and syrup
19 Merrie: Be quiet! Doughnuts,
20 and cake,
21 and brownies,
22 and pineapple juice
23 _____: peanut butter
24 Merrie: Ugh! Be quiet. And peanut butter,
25 and juice,
26 and cookies,
27 Bea: (?)
28 Merrie: Will you be quiet, Bea! [throws leaves at Bea]
29 DR: Don't throw leaves, Merrie
30 Merrie: I get mad. Um, and ch- and ch- and chocolate milk.
31 [to audience:] Be quiet
32 _____: Oh, yummy, chocolate milk
33 Merrie: Be quiet. And white milk,
34 and orange juice,
35 and lemonade,
36 quiet, and um [pause] and um [pause] um and like and
37 (?) I mean, and and then she started off walking,
38 and her mother [continues the narration]

This construction uses the sort of parallelism usually found in the kindergarteners' stories. The narrator establishes a syntactic frame at the beginning of the construction and then details entries to the meaning set. Neither her entries nor those of the audience propose sub-paradigms.

However, the exchange is remarkable in several respects. Most obvious is the fact of its length. Merrie provides the frame "and they had _____" at line 11. Fourteen turns at talking and twenty-two meaning set entries later, she resumes the plot development of her story. The length of the exchange suggests that kindergarteners are able to sustain paradigmatic constructions across numerous multiple speaker contributions and through a considerable period of time. However, in noting this, I should also take into account an interactional factor that helped sustain the children's interest. This factor, of course, is the antagonism that develops between Merrie and her audience. Merrie is primarily concerned with maintaining control over both the story and the audience. She seems to feel that the audience should not merely refrain from interjecting comments. They should also sit quietly, giving her their full attention. They most certainly should not talk among themselves. Merrie thus wants to be not only the sole storyteller but also the sole focus of attention. In defending the latter position, she objects to the audience's conversations (lines 1-10). In defending her role as the storyteller, she offers more entries to the meaning set than her audience. In addition, though she accepts some commentary as relevant (lines 12-14; 23-24), she dismisses most of the proposed entries. For their part, the audience becomes irritated with Merrie's prima donna attitude. To be sure, they recognize the semantic parameter Merrie has proposed. Their entries to the meaning set do indeed elaborate the category of "food that Red Riding Hood takes to her grandmother." However, they offer these entries over Merrie's strenuous objections. Indeed, Merrie's reactions seem to fuel the audience's resolve. In supplying their entries, the children do not merely comment on Merrie's meaning set. Nor do they merely object to her dismissing their contributions. In addition, the audience seems to be challenging Merrie's prior restrictions on their behavior. Except insofar as they might have interrupted Merrie's concentration and bruised her ego as the storyteller, the audience's previous conversations (lines 1-10) did not affect the composition of the story per se. In the audience's opinion, therefore,

Merrie had no authority over such backgrounded talk. Apparently, the children felt that if they were not permitted to talk quietly among themselves, they would make their presence painfully obvious. Merrie wants one kind of involvement in her storytelling; the audience gives her another. The children taunt Merrie with parody (lines 7-8), with criticism (lines 13-14), and with repeated contributions to the meaning set.

Comparative Data

With the exception of Merrie's story about the "fishies" (excerpts 3 and 5), the stories treated above are based on narratives that the children learned from adults. This fact raises an interesting question: In initiating parallelistic constructions, to what extent did the narrators rely on their own story-making skills and to what extent might they have borrowed from the adults' versions? An adequate answer to the second part of this question would require studying the stories that the adults delivered. This is data to which I do not have access. With the narratives of these kindergarteners, therefore, the question of adult influence must remain unanswered. However, we can consider the alternate topic: the relevance of parallelism to children's storytelling itself.

As mentioned previously, Sutton-Smith's (1981) collection of children's stories focuses on spontaneously generated narratives. This corpus provides useful comparative data to the Austin material. A survey of the corpus reveals that children between two and nine years of age can rely on parallelism in organizing their made-up narratives. Admittedly, in his own discussion, Sutton-Smith does not treat parallelism per se. As I explain, though, parallelism represents one way in which children apply what Sutton-Smith terms "the principle of theme and variation."

According to Sutton-Smith, the principle of theme and variation constitutes a particular kind of cognitive organization or internal "grammar." Children tend to rely on this grammar in managing a variety of expressive activities. The principle can inform children's drawings, their play with

objects, their games, their practice with language, and their storytelling. In applying theme and variation, children tend to repeat an action over and again, varying its expression in sometimes subtle ways. To an adult, these repetitions might seem almost mechanically redundant. As Sutton-Smith points out, though, the children are actually pursuing a selected focus through a sequence of changing backgrounds (pp. 8-9).

Sutton-Smith found that his two- through four-year-old informants relied on theme and variation in approximately half of their narratives (p. 9). In some cases, the children modified a theme across a set of stories. In other cases, they used theme and variation to organize individual narratives. It is this latter application that is of concern here. Narrative (8) below, given by a two-year-old boy, provides a typical example. As in other narratives told by very young children, time references here are disjunctive. In effect, the story is held together paradigmatically, through the offices of theme and variation. The boy explores an "up and down" vector or central theme. Variation develops as the boy applies this theme to the characters of the monkeys, the choo choo train, I, and daddy, respectively:

(8) The monkeys
they went up sky
they fall down
choo choo train in the sky
I fell down in the sky in the water
I got on my boat and my legs hurts
daddy fall down in the sky
(pp. 53-54)

Story (9) shows a more specialized use of theme and variation. Here, a two-year-old girl uses syntactic and semantic parallelism:

(9) The slide hits the swing
and the bench bumped the ceiling

the bag bumped the fence
the watergun bumped the cigarette
the swing bumped the water-fountain
and the slide bumped the puddle
(p. 49)

The story's central theme or vector considers the act of bumping. The girl's repeating the frame "the _____ bumped the _____" calls attention to this theme. Variation develops with the entries to the frame's meaning sets. The terms "bench," "bag," "watergun," "swing," and "slide" describe various agents that bump. The terms "ceiling," "fence," "cigarette," "water-fountain," and "puddle" form the meaning set of "phenomena that are bumped."

By pointing out the parallelism in story (9), I do not mean to suggest that its two-year-old narrator has self-consciously selected and employed these devices. The child has merely told a story for her own entertainment and that of her listeners. What I do want to emphasize is that children as young as two years can rely on parallelism when organizing made-up narratives. And further, that as an expression of theme and variation parallelism reflects organizational principles of intrinsic interest to children themselves. This interest is also evident in the stories of pre-schoolers one to two years older than the narrator of the story above. For example, consider narrative (10), offered by a three-year-old boy. The boy uses the syntactic frame "the _____ meeted a _____." In filling the frame's slots, the boy identifies various agents and addressees who are engaged in the act of meeting:

(10) It's about a whaler
long long time ago there was a cat
and he met a whaler
and the whaler meeted a dog and the dog was meeted by a man
the man meeted a machine and the machine meeted another machine and
another machine meeted a cow

and the cow meeted another cow
and the cow meeted a dog
and the dog meeted nobody
the end

(p. 95)

Narrative (11) is the effort of a four-year-old boy who uses the frame "(then) _____ came." In this story, references to the act of arrival are held constant while the identity of the arriving characters is varied:

(11) One day was a bullfight
airpiane came
monster
and then a blast-off came
and then airplane came again
and then a racing car came and crashed the airplane
and then a baby came
monster came
everyone came
and then everyone stopped the fire
all the peoples came to see the fire
now it's finished

(p. 106)

According to Sutton-Smith, children show a marked interest in theme and variation until about the age of three and a half. After that time, they become increasingly attracted to stories emphasizing plot development (pp. 9, 16). By reviewing the pre-schoolers' and the kindergarteners' stories given above, I can illustrate this shift in orientation, at least as it concerns the use of parallelism. Narrative (9), told by a two-year-old, relies primarily on parallelism for its organization. In comparison to this narrative, stories (10) and (11)--told by a three-year-old and a four-year-old --are more complicated. They depend on both paradigmatic and syntagmatic

strategies. Story (11) is the more sophisticated of the two. At the paradigmatic level, story (11) contains a parallelistic construction. The narrator organizes the story's interior set of clauses by repeating and filling the syntactic frame "(then) _____ came." Interestingly, some of the clauses affected by this construction also contribute to the story's cohesiveness at the syntagmatic level. The narrator links these clauses with the conjunction "and." Finally, the story is held together by the narrator's suggestion of a plot. In effect, the story tells of a car-airplane crash which results in a fire; a crowd then gathers to watch the fire. For their part, the Austin kindergarteners also made use of both syntagmatic and paradigmatic strategies. However, the kindergarteners did not "blend" their use of these strategies as in narrative (11). Though often episodic and circuitous, the kindergarteners' stories were oriented toward plot development. As treated in preceding discussion, a narrator would occasionally put this development on hold as he or she detailed the paradigm of a meaning set.

An interest in "localizing" parallelistic constructions is not unique to the Austin kindergarteners. As I've shown, five-year-olds in Sutton-Smith's sample could do the same. Furthermore, we should note that similar uses of parallelism crop up in the stories of even older children. By their own choice, the seven- through nine-year-olds in the Austin sample told primarily traditional narratives, stories that had circulated within the peer group. Of their few made-up stories, only one develops a parallelistic construction. This construction resembles those found in the kindergarteners' stories. The narrative, delivered by an eight-year-old girl, is excerpted below. I have numbered and underscored the constructions:

(12) there in back of [the boys] was a wicked ghost. So they um started running out the door, but they couldn't find the door because it was a haunted house and it disappeared [pause] um so they were locked in there forever and ever all their life, and uh they were (?), and finally one day (1) they turned into vampires, and goblins, and stuff

like that, and (2) sometimes they were half rats, and half witches, and half ghosts, and stuff, and they never were boys again, and uh one day their mother came looking for them [continues the narration]

Similar constructions are found in stories told by Sutton-Smith's older informants. Like the narrator of story (12) above, these children tended to restrict parallelism to discrete passages within their plot narratives.[6] Most often, these passages stress semantic parallelism. However, both semantic and syntactic parallelism are occasionally employed in advancing a story's plot. The following narrative, told by an eight-year-old girl, illustrates both approaches. I have numbered and underscored the parallelistic constructions; the punctuation and capitalization are Sutton-Smith's:

(13) Once upon a time there was a girl, she loved animals. (1) She had two cats, five dogs, three horses, a frog, two lizards, a hamster, some fishes, six gerbils, a couple of mice, and her name was Nancy. She loved her horses most of all. She loved to read. She adores math, and she's always on time for lunch [smiles] and today she made a new friend and that friend's name was Lizzie. Her and that friend took two of her horses and went riding in the woods. They were riding for a long time. Then all of a sudden they couldn't recognize the road. Then they were lost. While they were gone, (2) Nancy's gerbils died. Her cats died. Her other horse died of loneliness. Her dogs died. Her hamster died. Her mice died. Her frogs and her lizards died. Her fishes died. All of her animals died. That was very sad. Finally her horses found the way home. But when they got there, the dogs didn't run up and start licking her, the cats didn't run away from the dogs. (3) The frog and the lizards weren't inside. The fish wasn't inside. Her hamster wasn't inside. All of her animals weren't there. Her mother told her about the tragedy. She was very sad. She was down in the droops reading the book. The book was called Franny and Zooey. She felt very sad so she ran away from home. The end. (1981:235)

The ages of four and five represent a transition period. It is during these years that children shift from an emphasis on paradigmatic to syntagmatic strategies of narrative organization. That is, the children become increasingly attracted to stories emphasizing plot development. As I have shown, though, youngsters five years of age and older can retain an interest in parallelistic constructions. In contrast to the pre-schoolers, these older children tend to restrict the constructions to discrete passages within their plot stories. The fact of this restriction or "localization" may itself constitute an expression of the theme and variation principle, but one operative at the level of the speech act. The act of presenting a story can be viewed as the constant which is pursued through alternative means. Children interrupt the flow of their plot stories to examine the paradigm of a meaning set.

Summary and Conclusions

Admittedly, parallelistic constructions are not common in either my own or Sutton-Smith's samples. They appear in one-fourth (7 of 28) of the Austin kindergarteners' stories. With Sutton-Smith's collection, they are found in approximately 8% (18 of 234) of the pre-schoolers' stories and in approximately 8% (25 of 315) of the school children's narratives. These relatively low figures, however, do not mean that parallelism should be of little interest to students of children's discourse. Drawing on Sutton-Smith's work, I have suggested that parallelistic constructions reflect children's interest in the organizational principle of theme and variation. Children apply this principle through a range of expressive activities. Semantic and syntactic-semantic parallelism represent two ways in which some youngsters employ theme and variation in their storytelling.

Sutton-Smith (1981:8-9) has noted that theme and variation serves several functions. It allows children to give a sense of order to their activities. In addition, it allows them practice with thematic abstraction and with subject-object relations. Children's use of parallelistic constructions serves similar functions. The construction can give a sense

of cohesiveness to the efforts of young narrators, and they provide a mechanism by which older storytellers can organize descriptions of the fictive world. The more prevalent type of parallelism found, semantic parallelism, emphasizes cataloging skills. In these constructions, the children hold constant the stated and then implied syntactic frame as well as the central idea of the meaning set. These factors are analogous to Sutton-Smith's vector or central theme. Variation develops as the children consider the range of phenomena that can be appropriately described within the meaning set's central idea. By developing sub-paradigms within the larger paradigm of the meaning set, children gain additional practice with taxonomic skills. Furthermore, such sub-paradigms can increase a story's cohesiveness, a factor that can become especially important during multiple speaker narration.

The interactional development of a meaning set can serve several functions. The cataloging of meaning set entries provides narrators with a resource for fleshing out their stories. Such catalogs contribute to the length of a narrative, thus increasing the amount of time that a child serves in the storyteller's role. Although they might not be self-consciously aware of this consequence, it is clear that, among the Austin children at least, maintaining the storyteller's role was considered important (Roemer 1980). For their part, audience members can capitalize on the central idea of a meaning set in attempting conarration. Furthermore, as in other types of interjected routines, the audience can use its participation in these constructions to comment on textual as well as extra-textual concerns. Finally, in responding to audience contributions, narrators deal with questions concerning speaking rights and the boundaries of narrative itself.

NOTES

1. Exceptions to this statement include Sutton-Smith's (1981) work which is discussed below, Roger Abrahams' (1970) work with the dozens in a Black Philadelphia neighborhood, and Gary Gossen's (1972, 1974a, 1974b) studies of Chamula oral tradition. However, both Abrahams and Gossen survey children's behavior as a facet of a larger community's speech economy.

2. Funding for this fieldwork was provided by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Austin, Texas. Funds originated with the National Institute of Education. The opportunity to study the data was made possible in part by a summer (1979) Research Grant from the Dean's Office, School of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education, Purdue University. This support is gratefully acknowledged.

3. The text of this and three other of the narratives treated are given in the Appendix. The children's names used throughout the discussion are pseudonyms.

4. Admittedly, the cohesiveness of lines 6-9 depends in part on an embedded syntactic frame: "_____ for _____." I will consider embedded constructions in subsequent discussion. To the point here, the relationship of the larger unit of lines 4-9 to the frame "He filled _____ with _____" is implied.

5. As with the Austin kindergarteners, children in Sutton-Smith's sample who used parallelism tended to do so in more than one narrative. This is the case with this five-year-old boy. He uses parallelism in stories given on pp. 138-139 of Sutton-Smith's collection.

6. Sutton-Smith (1981:19) suggests a similar point when considering older narrators' use of poetic devices. Like their younger counterparts, older children can use these devices in exploring theme and variation. In contrast to pre-schoolers, however, older narrators tend to limit their use of prosody, alliteration, etc., to isolable passages.

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Appendix

Text A

Lydia: Once upon a time there lived a family, and there was a mother, father, a little girl, and a little boy, and a baby girl, and a baby boy, and they lived in a home on Christmas Eve, and not even a sound, not even a mouse [pause] in the house, not even a mouse

_____: in the house

Lydia: Shh! be quiet [pause] and the little boy and the little girl said, "I I wanna," no, just the little girl said, no, the little girl and the little boy said, "Let's stay up and see Santa Claus." So Santa Claus started the sleigh [pause] Donner, Dixon, Blitzen [pause]

_____: Donner and Dixon

Lydia: No, Donner, Dixon, Blitzer [pause] Cupert

_____: and Vixen

Lydia: and Vixen [pause] some of those reindeers and all the others guided what he did and and (?) what he did, and they started off, and the first house was the family house, not even the house, not even the mouse, not even a mouse in the house [pause] when they were awake [pause] they couldn't stay, they couldn't stay (?), they couldn't stay up, and so [pause] all their stockings hangin' up on the fire-, down down goes the chimney Saint Nicholas and all. He filled up the stockings with horns, balls, toys, all, all, dolls for children, dolls for girls, horns for boys, (?) for boys and everything all. He filled the stockings with nuts. He filled the stockings with balloons. He filled it with everywhere and everything. He filled up the stockings with everything. He filled 'em. He filled 'em. He filled 'em with toys, then with a wink, his nose bright as a cherry, and his face like an apple, up the chimney he rose with his nose to his [pause] his nose to his [pause] I mean his finger to his nose, and up he rose. He guided the sl-, he he he said, "Go," and the reindeers went off to the moon [pause]

and another house. [Voice softens:] Christmas Eve is coming.

Text B

Merrie: Once upon a time there was a little turtle, and he was crawling around in the uh, he was crawling around in the water, and then the snappy octopus tried to snap him, but he got away and snap snapped his whole body 'cause he had a big giant mouth and then [pause] um all the fishies in the ocean tried to grab the giant octopus, and the giant octopus was very mean so all the fishies had to get him, and when and and when it was nighttime and the fish were all asleep, he he got away, and then they looked for him all again and [pause] it was hard! And then they went, and then they went out of the water, and they still didn't die because it was sunny, rainy, windy, and all those kinds of things, and

Silva: snowy?

Merrie: Yeah, and snowy, and so they didn't die, and so they looked around in the forest until all these reindeers and peacocks and bunny rabbits had to save 'em from all the other mean animals because they were the strongest ones they can only find 'cause they're eating some things which are real good for them and (?) when the sun, when the sun started sun-setting it it was, and then the moon started coming up, and then the moon and then they are going up, down, up and down, up and down, and then one of the reindeers said, "What's going on around this moon?" and they kept moving around until this little baby bear tried to eat 'em up, but he couldn't, but when he ate all that kind of food, he looked like um [pause] a fat um [pause] lemme see, a fat round ball, and you can jump on him, and and when his tummy was real fat to that telephone pole up there [points to a telephone pole nearby], oooh and he, yuk! He liked to climb on his tummy like a big mountain, and then [pause] and then [pause] and then wh- wh- and then when, and then when it rainied and the sun came up, all the flowers and the ra-, giant

flowers and the r-, big fat flowers and all the animals sleeped on him because they're was so nice and smelled good [pause] that's the end of mine.

Text C

Silva: Once upon a time there lived an awful witch. She hated children. One day her big black cat took her hat, and threw it in the dungeon, and when the witch waked up, she couldn't find her hat, and was so, and she was so angry that she threw her nightgown in out the window, and she went outside naked. It's kind of funny. And she told all the people she lost her hat, and if she didn't have a hat on Halloween Day, she'd be so (?)! She'd be riding without her black hat. And one day, and one day the witch put on all her clothes, and went down to the dungeon, and she saw too little kids. They were playing with the old stuff she hated, and their names were some people, but I don't know, and she caught them, and they had a black cat [pause] and she went upstairs, and took off all her clothes, and went down naked and and she showed them her vagina, and she sang a song about it.

[sings loudly:] Vagina, va-gi-na
Get outa here, you stupid kid!

Troy: Yeah, she went [sings:]
Vagina, va-gi-na
Look at my vagina
Giny, giny, giny, poo-poo [laughs]

Silva: and the kids shitted on the witch on her va-gi-las, and now the witch went upstairs and went to the toilet. She pulled down her underwear and all the poop came out, and it fell in the dungeon

Troy: Oooh, yeah, the dungeon was her toilet

Silva: Ok, and then she went to sle p, and the wickedest thing happened. Her cat came back with a piece of poop on it. The dungeon was filled with all the stuff she went potty in, and it has the bad

stuff like boogers, and vaginas, wieners

Troy: Yeah, hot dog wieners

Silva: and pisses

Troy: pisses?

Silva: and pisses

Troy: Yeah, and pisses on the wienies

Silva: and um she had one little cat, and it was smaller than any other cat, and she said, "Go away and find my black hat!" And so she he walked away like this [crawls a short distance] and (looked?) <u>everywhere</u>, and he couldn't find the black hat. Pretty soon he came to a little old dark house, and he went in, and he found this little rocking chair, and under it was her big black hat. So he helped her search for the witch's hat, and so! he found the black hat and brought it to the witch, and the witch said [shouts:], "Now, where's my underwear?" And this silly cat, she threw her underwear in the dungeon, and she said, "Where's my lost underwear what I wear for Halloween?" She saw it in the dungeon. Was a piece of poo-poo inside of it [pause] poop inside of it, and all the people in town said, "Whoo-whoo! Look at that naked witch. She's flyin' up in the air with her vagina stickin' up!" And it's goin' poop-poop-poop, and her bosoms are going [jumps up and down], and that's the end of my story, and after there's a song that goes: [sings:] The witch she lives on top of (?)
The mountain the witch she lived on top of the moun-tain
She lost her hat and (underwear?)
She lost it in the dungeon.

That's all. My mama told me the story. I just made up the bad words.

Text D

(Narrator: Eight years old)

Kathy: One night these two boys went out to this haunted house, and all the lights keep going on every single day and every single night and never would turn off, and so one night the boys went in, and they heard something spooky so they jumped back, and there in back of them was a wicked ghost so they um started running out the door, but they couldn't find the door because it was a haunted house, and it disappeared um so they were locked in there forever and ever all their life, and uh they were (?), and finally one day they turned into vampires, and goblins, and stuff like that, and sometimes they were half rats, and half witches, and half ghosts, and stuff, and they never were boys again, and uh one day their mother came looking for them, and they went to the haunted house, and they saw their sons as wicked witches and stuff like that because they just turned back, and they only do it once a year, and so their mother was taking them out when they saw the door gone. They started turning back into ghosts and wiched [sic] witch and stuff like that, and the mother didn't know what to do so she started running, and she ran into the mirror, and she broke her head open and stuff like that, and then the father came one day to look for their children, and they found he found 'em, and the same thing happened as his mother their mother, and so finally their aunt came, but the same thing didn't happen because she one day went out of the haunted house. She found the secret door, and she knew how to get 'em outside in the plain air. They turned back to their real life again, and the mother and father never found the secret way out.